

JEANETTE LOCKE RUSSELL and JANE MARTHA RUSSELL

October 19, 1977, Port of New York Authority, waiting for the 6 P.M. Short Line bus to Carbondale, Gate 103: That I should think about Aunts Nettie and Jennie in such a setting as this, strikes me as odd. That incongruity aside, perhaps notwithstanding, the biographies of Aunt Nettie and Aunt Jennie begin for me when they were both over 80. Just how old I was when I first recall going down to 35 River Street to visit, I'm not sure. I do clearly remember Aunts Nettie and Jennie being out to Riverside for holiday dinners, but I'm not sure if my memory of the Russell sisters being at Riverside predates my memory of visiting at 35 River Street or not. Whatever the case, Aunt Nettie and Aunt Jennie were both in their eighties when I first became aware of them as individuals. Assume that I was seven when I first really became aware of the Russell sisters as individuals, that would mean that the year was 1950. In 1950 Aunt Nettie was 84 and Aunt Jennie was 82!!! What about the first 80 years. What happened in the first eighty years in each of their lives that makes them so interesting to me? What did they represent to me in 1950? What did they stand for in 1950? Why was I so strongly attracted to them at the time? Why am I so strongly attracted to them at the moment? Why have I begun to think about them both at the present? Certainly the Port Authority has nothing to do with it. This world, i.e., the Port Authority, and the world inhabited by Aunts Nettie and Aunt Jennie could not be more different. One of my very clear memories of 35 River Street is of an air fern that lived in a small glass dish--it seems to me it was a small glass basket or perhaps a glass hat. Whatever the container/dish, it was one of the mysteries of the world how the fern lived on air, if you please. The fern was of this world and yet it was not. Aunts Nettie and Jennie were of this world and yet they were not. Aunt Nettie and Aunt Jennie were born at the Russell Homestead and lived there until they were forty-seven and forty-five, respectively. Their father, James Russell, died when Aunt Nettie was six and Aunt Jennie was four. Their mother, Margaret Gillespie Locke, died when Aunt Nettie was thirty-eight and Aunt Jennie was thirty-six. Who were the members of the Russell Homestead during those years? Assume that the year is 1877: Aunt Nettie was 11 and Aunt Jennie was 9, Grandpa Russell was 6. Which of the brothers and sisters of Nettie, Jennie and WAR were at home at the time? John? James? Margaret? George? Christina Anderson? Rutherford Birchard Hayes was President of the United States. Gustav Mahler was 16. MGLR was in charge. Who did the heavy work around the farm? When did Christian Marshall, Senior, appear on the scene? He worked for MGLR, I know, but I do not know when he first appeared on the staff. Given the fact that Aunts Nettie and Jennie and WAR were the three youngest children, were they closer, so to speak, to each other than they were to their older brothers and sisters? Where did everyone sleep? Where was MGLR's room? I wonder if JLR or JMR or WAR ever spoke of "their" room when they were a kid? Certainly all three of them could have walked around the Homestead and said: "Before the house was turned, this room used to be . . ." and so on. Why am I so interested in knowing about the disposition of the rooms in the Russell Homestead before the house was turned? It is not, to be sure, out of any desire to "put it back the way it was." That would be naive. My interest is, I believe, purely historical. I want to know about all of the stages/steps: this is what is, and these are the steps on the path to becoming what is; that which precedes is not a rough draft it is an end unto itself. Would it not be a grand event to take a walk around the Homestead, through all of the rooms, with Aunt Nettie or Aunt Jennie at your side? On October 20, 1977, HLRP said: "All the relatives seemed to do things for Aunt Nettie and Aunt Jennie. Spencer gave them milk. Pop would take them vegetables. They would sell eggs for Pop." In what year did WAR become the man of the house? In 1900 WAR was 29, in 1905 WAR was 34. I wonder what the reaction at The Homestead was when the principals learned of the death of Queen Victoria in 1901? La reine est morte. Vive la reine!